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SUBJECT: EMBASSY TOKYO CELEBRATES INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

REF: STATE 26653

¶1. (U) Ambassador Schieffer hosted on March 4 Embassy Tokyo's first-ever event in honor of International Women's Day. More than 180 women, including Japanese Diet members, government officials, academics, members of the press and female diplomats from 25 nations, attended the inaugural event. Guests of honor included Imperial Highness Princess Takamado, Minister of State for Gender Equality and Social Affairs Yoko Kamikawa, and former Minister of Defense Yuriko Koike.

¶2. (U) In his welcoming remarks, the Ambassador highlighted the great progress women have made in attaining equality in the United States, noting women currently make up more than fifty percent of the student body in both U.S. law and medical schools. Minister Kamikawa emphasized Japan's efforts to bring more women into the workforce and the GOJ's adoption of the Work-Life Balance Charter in December 2007. Kamikawa explained the non-binding charter encourages Japan's private sector to adopt more family-friendly policies. Former Defense Minister Minister Koike noted the strides Japanese women have made since gaining suffrage in 1945 and said women now make up more than 20% of Japan's Diet.

¶3. (U) Many guests expressed their surprise that the U.S. Embassy would host an event in honor of International Women's Day, saying it typically was the Russians or the Chinese that celebrate the occasion. Others expressed their enthusiastic support for the event and encouraged Embassy representatives to continue it in the future.

¶4. (U) In addition to the reception, on March 21, Embassy Tokyo will co-organize with Japan Women's University an international symposium entitled "Creating a Second Chance for Women: Helping Mothers Get Back to Work." The symposium will feature preeminent leaders and experts in the field from the U.S., Japan and Korea. Post expects 250 participants including business leaders, government officials, academics and media. Post is also sponsoring two U.S. experts who are traveling around the country speaking on this subject to audiences outside of Tokyo.
SCHIEFFER